

Public Meetings
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To the Citizens of Brandon

The Brandon Teachers feel that the public and they alike are faced with a very difficult and serious situation. They feel that the issues at stake which vitally concern every parent and citizen in this community have not been presented as fully and clearly as they could wish or as this unparalleled situation demands. As the regular means of publicity seemed, to all practical purposes, to be closed to them in this matter, they are taking this means of acquainting you with the following facts connected with the situation that you may take an intelligent attitude towards the whole issue.

During the early years of the war, the salary schedule obtaining in Brandon did not compare favorably with the renumeration offered in other centres. Living costs, as you know full well, rose early and rapidly after war broke out. In spite of this fact in 1915 the Board suspended the annual increases as provided for by the schedule, which was in effect a reduction. There had been negotiations between the Board and the Brandon Teachers regarding salary schedule and bonuses in the fall and winter of 1918-19. This had resulted in a bonus being given for that year. In the year 1919-20 further relief was sought in the form of a permanent schedule. No agreement was reached, but the Board finally adopted a schedule on June 21, 1920 and presented it to the staff. The teachers in turn presented a schedule for the consideration of the Board. This differed from that presented by the Board in two essential respects. The schedule was higher throughout, and it embodied the principle of recognition of years of service. As the School Board declined to further discuss the matter, the Board of Reference was called in. This Board after a careful survey of the whole situation recommended that the schedule passed by the Board June 1920, be accepted, and that the teachers be given their proper places on this schedule. In connection with this finding the following facts are evident:

1. The Reference Board did not grant an increased schedule but recommended the schedule already passed by the School Board.
2. The Reference Board recognized the justice and fairness of the contention that years of service were a factor in determining the value of a teacher to the city.

Nothing further developed until February 27, 1922. On this date the employees of the Board—including the Superintendent, were called together and advised that owing to a deficit in the finances of the city it became necessary to cut down school expenses, and after enlarging on the need for retrenchment they read us a resolution which the Board had passed two days previously, reading as follows:

"That it being apparent that the Board's revenue will not put it in funds for payment of more than 75 per cent of the Teachers' schedule, the teachers and Superintendent be asked to consider the situation and accept the present reduction of 25 per cent effective March 1st, 1922, subject to the possibility of additions by way of bonuses if revenues available for the year will in the judgment of the Board, permit; also that failing an immediate agreement notice be given of the termination of all contracts on or before May 1st, 1922.

The Teachers protested against being stampeded into giving an immediate answer to so serious a proposition and finally it was agreed to adjourn the meeting to the following Saturday, the teachers agreeing to accept notice on that date from the Board, if formally rendered, as on March 1st.

During the intervening days the teachers considered the situation in the light of all the information they could secure, and on Saturday gave the following reply to the Board:—

"To the Chairman and Members of the School Board, Brandon: —We the undersigned principals, heads of departments and members of the teaching staff of the Collegiate Institute and Public Schools of the city have given very earnest consideration to the proposal of the School Board.

We have tried to study the question from every standpoint so that a fair and just decision might be reached. As a result of careful deliberation we have come to the conclusion that we cannot accede to the proposal.

We take a view that a deficit in the finances of the city is not a sound and proper principle upon which to base a reduction in the salaries of teachers."

This was signed by every member of the staff but one—who was ill and could not be consulted.

The Superintendent at the same meeting handed in a letter stating that he entirely concurred in the attitude taken by the teachers. The staff was immediately notified that all contracts would be terminated on April 30. These notices were duly received by each individual on the following Monday.

On Tuesday, March 14, the principals, heads of departments, certain members of the staff, and the Superintendent met a committee of the Board on the invitation of the Board. The Chairman, Mr. Fitton, urged that there was no dispute between the Board and the staff—both were the victims of circumstances. Dr. Spiers then asked us on behalf of the Board to reconsider our former decision and accept 25 per cent reduction from March 1st to June 30, that the schools might be kept open to the end of the term. Mr. C. King following him, urged the general business depression, and felt that few teachers on the staff would find difficulty in doing as had been requested. One lady present spoke up saying that she was on minimum salary, and could not get along on 75 per cent of this. The chairman stated that he appreciated the frankness of this statement, but felt that not all those on the minimum would be thus affected. (N.B.—there are about thirty teachers on minimum now.) When asked to explain he observed that many were living at home and did not have to pay board. This remark raised a storm of protest from the

teachers,—one remarking that this had been stressed quite enough—that it was openly discussed outside the city, and that the Board had no right to penalise the homes in order to keep up the educational facilities of the city. The following points of view were urged upon the Board.

The request of the Board asking the staff to bear such a heavy share of the burden of the alleged deficit was manifestly unfair, since it was asking ninety individuals to bear a burden that properly belongs to the whole body of citizens. It is especially unfair in view of the well-known fact that during the years of the war and right up to January 1921 (some six years) the teachers were consistently underpaid.

As the Trustees are responsible to the people for the maintaining of an efficient system of education in Brandon, we urged that the School Board prepare its budget on that basis (efficiency) and present it to the council, asking them to levy for the amount asked for as required by law.

We also urged that in view of the alleged crisis in the financial affairs of the city, public meetings should be called at which the whole situation should be placed frankly and fully before the people.

None of these proposals seemed to appeal to the committee, and they requested that we place their proposition before the teachers and ask for their answer. This we agreed to do and asked that it be restated and given to us in writing. Mr. King thereupon read a statement which was at once objected to as not corresponding with the statement made by Dr. Spiers. The chairman finally concluded that this committee would get together, draft the statement and give it to us in writing.

On Thursday, March 16, Mr. White handed the association a letter which he had received from Mr. King, with the request that it be submitted to all the members of the teaching staff (exclusive of the Collegiate) and that they give their individual reply by Saturday noon following. The Collegiate Teachers received a similar letter addressed to Principal McDougall. The question is as follows:

"On what terms are you prepared to continue your duties on the teaching staff for May and June, having in mind your responsibility to the children of the city and the financial conditions which at present confront the Board?" This was signed by Clarence King, Chairman of the management committee.

Our reply was handed in under date of March 24th, 1922.

In the opening the letter from the Board is quoted in full, followed by

"In reply to the above letter in which you ask upon what terms we are prepared to continue our work until June 30, 1922, we the undersigned members of the Brandon Teachers' association wish to state the following.

1. We feel that any responsibility to the school population of this city that might fairly have been considered as ours for May and June, was effectively nullified by the notice of termination of contract received at your hands by the individual teachers.

2. We wish to reaffirm our unshaken conviction that a deficit in the finances of the city is not a sound and proper basis upon which to base a reduction in the salaries of teachers.

3. Inasmuch as the present schedule is the result of the award of an independent outside Board, we take the stand that any change in the schedule not mutually agreed upon should be contingent upon a decision reached by a body similarly constituted.

We are prepared to continue our services during May and June at our present schedule rate of pay on the following conditions:

(a) That you agree to rescind the motion on the minutes of the Board that provided for a reduction of 25 per cent in salaries or the termination of all contracts and that you recall individually all notices to this effect sent to the members of the staff.

This offer is conditional upon acceptance by the School Board within one week from date.

Dated at Brandon, this twenty-fourth day of March, 1922.

Signed by eighty-four members of the staff, two were ill and had no opportunity to sign, one was away on leave of absence. We received no reply from the Board to this letter.

On March 28th the advertisement from the Board appeared in the Daily press, inviting applications to fill the positions in Brandon schools for May and June (exclusive of the Manual Training, Domestic Science, Art and Physical Instruction Departments.)

We have only to add that our line of action in this whole matter has originated wholly with ourselves. We are glad however to know that our attitude throughout has met with the entire approval of the Manitoba Teacher's Federation, as the following advertisement now appearing in the Daily Papers plainly indicates.

"The Executive of the Manitoba Teachers' Federation have approved of the action taken by the Brandon Teachers and ask teachers of Manitoba to observe a professional attitude."

In conclusion we can only restate our attitude on the whole matter. We consider it wrong in principle to cut teachers' salaries because of civic financial difficulties. If our schedule is too high, we maintain that the proper way to establish this is to refer the whole situation to an independent outside Board. Our present schedule was established on the recommendation of such a Board, and any adjustments to the schedule should be determined by the same procedure.

THE EXECUTIVE OF THE BRANDON
TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION